

# DELTA

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# delta

Edited by CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

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## CNOSSUS

CONSTANTINE TRY PANIS

Palace of pointed horns, and blind  
Ceremonial gesture in the wind;  
Horns, where the jagged constellations pause,  
Tearing the brown Aegyptian mummy-gauze.  
O coiling corridors alive with wanton breath,  
The brutal nostril searching out its prize !  
Wine, dance and raving flutes, and blood that cries,  
Rich justice in rich death.

In that deep conflagration of the blood  
Veins are swelling, and in the ears the thud  
On thud of hidden water, deep as Hades' river,  
Tumbling forever.  
And silent the libations of distress,  
And soft the feel of wrinkled feet on stone,  
At the king's festival, petals being blown  
Across the dark court's emptiness.

Minoan ships are sleeping in the trees,  
And tight-hipped men trapped on their stucco frieze.  
Rich-bosomed women in steep solitude  
With blue-scaled fish that swallow and exude  
An ocre sea beyond the waste of broom;  
Flower-cups swollen with Minos' gold,  
Fracturing the buried jars that hold  
A hollow gloom.

King Minos' justice, feather-tilted scales  
Weighing the swirling thistle-down that sails  
Out through the night, where neither tears nor gold  
Can bribe the scales, when all is told.  
And still the bull tramples the Attic plain,  
The starless heaven shuddering as he roars;  
And still the soul opens the palace doors  
To find her judge again.

## GRAVID MOTHER AND CRIPPLE

PETER REDGROVE

### I.

Pyramid  
White fitted to gray  
Trundles askew  
Rocks at the edge of my eye

Tight-skirted and bloused  
Her bosomed white limps  
On gray hips into view,  
Sharp creases

Vomit bunches,  
Spasm, recover,  
As she, bent-axed,  
Tugs eyes along  
To the stomp of her stick,  
To the tail working free  
(Me crippled with child  
Boughed under the load.)

She eases down on a bench  
With a fine twig she strokes the water  
(Her stick clanks on the bars)  
Bowing a wailing pervasive treble  
Into the lake, and deafened fish flee.

Pestles grinding in granite some birds croaked,  
As an axe rings to the frosty wood they sang,  
Others gushed life at their silent partners  
Like the flutes blurred in the stream.

I sit rocking with blows from my navelled fruit,  
She looks into my womb,  
She looks, I look away,  
She pities me.

## II.

I rock by the side of the lake  
to the stumping of my stick  
rubber-shod not to jar  
up the shaft to my strong man's arm—  
a yacht in a roiling sea  
that no one else can see  
trim in my blouse as I can—  
only whining timbers are plain  
in a woman stout as a pear—  
walking I shake to ruin  
skewing towards my bed  
like a mother griping in pain.

I ease myself down on a bench  
my stick clanks against bars  
like a kind of castrate I sit  
out-staring the glassy lake—  
it is a stare I must break up—  
I take a bud-pimpled twig  
with the tip stroke the lake  
athletic bright fish skip away  
like a turning faceted jewel  
from the crutch the crooked stick.

There is one crippled with child  
short-breathed with her load  
that tugs like fruit on tree  
(God came to my bed  
He lodged His crippling seed  
I am ever in His labour  
I shall never be delivered)

I glance at the fruiting mother  
I wonder if she can see  
or is sunk in thoughts of her own  
this young stubby waddler  
that should widen out like a tree  
my envious mind is full  
short-breathed with its load--  
of the genes' agile quadrille  
and striding from man to girl—

pyramids of natures  
natures that blaze in the present  
my own flapping gray at a summit  
rooted original crowds  
stirring ants' hills of leaves—  
of the egg-swollen queen bee  
and her acres of rustling hives—  
crowds hushed to birds  
mothers at wait in the parks—

naturally occlusions like me  
many full-stops.

## DOUBLE MORNING

Roy FISHER

This long inconstant waking to a day  
Hung round with clouds, fouled with dark smears of rain  
On passive walls of grey  
That spent-out gusts obscurely trouble,  
Makes a contented window, whose wide pane  
Looks two ways on a world made double;  
Uncertain day, uncertain dream.

I wake under wings, among such wraps  
As yield to dawn's murk imperceptibly;  
My limbs succeed to histories that lapse  
Slow-fingered into the giant holes of night,  
From their persuasions loosing me,  
Comforted in this ashen world to remember them:  
Dreams of an unknown freedom and appetite.

For I have been through and still am moist from it  
Some place of birth in that last untroubled plain of sleep:  
    A misted, populous marl-pit  
        Where the body's made whole;  
And countless human limbs lie folded deep,  
Growing in ease under a silvered rain,  
In dream-earth's strange and common bowl  
Denuded of identity and pain.

Morning's cold glass lights my hand;  
My own corpse fingers moving in a bed  
    Feel on my flesh a shingle strand  
That sea scrubs under sleeping and half-awake;  
Touches that call back signs from the mothering dead  
Whose secret forms and rest I shared  
Before their soft revival at this daybreak.

Washed clear, like streets of shores after a storm,  
I take my colours only from gulls and shells.

    This love need not grow warm,  
But rests as winter soil under my thoughts  
And will upon my living flesh lie so  
After day's riding edge dispels  
The dream's mist and the dawn's uncertain window.

## OTHER TIMES

ROBERT NYE

Midsummer's liquid evenings linger even  
And make a tragedy of autumn bonfires  
Raw with a gardener's rubbish, flesh and scraps,  
The oily rags, old bike spokes, bones and cans  
And executed dolls unstitched and lax  
Folding pink little arms precipitant to ash.

The gold rains slowly; fireworks kick with green  
Attach all marigoldal to the hand,  
Stark blossoms of the may with lightning splashed  
Splinter in thunderstorms and by the roofs,  
Like girls on stilts, wind's purple shadows walk  
Dressed in stiff crinolines that gale the dark.

Few roundabouts and swings so covered up  
Down in the gravel hollows. Look how canvas  
Argues with tethering pegs as dirty flags  
Message and flap the steaming of the rain.  
Great circuses packed up and left the woods  
By useful bays, because the Sea had gone.

And you have gone, but still your silly moods  
Imprisoned in the semblance of midsummer  
Disturb the tumours of oncoming snow.  
' Do not remember me for I am here  
At other times,' you said. At other times  
I can remember but have loved enough.

### ON THE DEATH OF A SPINSTER

VINCENT BUCKLEY

She who through the dark  
Has stepped lightly down,  
Who wedded in peace the stark  
Suburbs of this town,  
Is dead. Is weighed as earth.  
And now, anonymous  
As the cricket under the hearth  
Or dithering cupboard-mouse,  
She is grown safe from our wit,  
From cat-call across the street,  
And the neighbour's cries of birth.  
Rain slackens. Her dust is laid.  
Sharp ribs that now commit  
With earth a sort of incest  
Lie firm in the vanishing breast.  
And, Lord, shall her old maid bones  
Be forced ? Or some late birth  
Disorder the prim feet ?  
What gardener driving a spade,  
Or lover, or exegete,  
Shall count these carnal stones ?

### CRIMINAL COURT

VINCENT BUCKLEY

So each man's wounded methodical life  
Will turn him back to the daylight year  
Of air and willows, where the creek  
Was a line of dim topaz and of flow  
Fretting the Autumn's mud and leaves ;  
Four or five kids in an Autumn dance  
Dark with rain

And one with a stranger darkness  
Mounting deep in his face.

Perpetual traffic shakes the winter roads  
Where light and the dying willows weep it past.  
Sad with a small fame, I watch  
The dying window-pane  
Till names that were lost for years return to wound  
The memory, or lie as a heavy arm  
Pressing against my heart.

The world is somehow blunted and less strange  
In essence, as it grows more strange in action;  
And twenty years are a drowning element,  
As befits topaz by old willows.  
With what slow pain names become persons, faces,  
Until, at last remembering, I cry out  
Like any refugee—not, not to be displaced,  
Not to be torn away.

Surely there's nothing here to wring the heart !  
Only a child who cased himself in crime  
To grow to the height of all the world,  
(And what is that but the height of each poor sinner ?)  
Hoping some dark would relax the fatal gleam  
Of eyes and limbs and alien soul.  
O deepening rain, O dead protective willows,  
How should you wring the heart?

Should I take, like him, my grip upon the dock,  
Assume his drowsed ear echoing to the hum  
Of voices irrelevant as traffic ?  
For what could I have done I have not done ?  
The unity of childhood is too small  
To save its members, and its rain-drenched eyes  
Interrogate, in each movement of the world,  
Only the brief trembling of a branch.

A line of death, a curve of many lives,  
Linking the worlds of five and twenty-six ;  
Something of dark, and a great light.  
The light I know, its sweet uncovering glow,  
But cannot recall this fading, when it began  
Or how I expected it to end—  
In mine, or in some other death.  
Was it a death of man or a death of willows ?

## SIX MODERN DUTCH POEMS

*translated by James S. Holmes*

### THE BIRDS

M. NIJHOFF (1894—1953)

When the steam whistle in the factory  
across the street has whistled time for lunch  
the workers start to fight, play soccer, eat  
together in a vacant walled-in lot.  
Meanwhile the birds collect along the eaves.  
The sky is asking breadcrumbs from the land.  
The gull has dipped already to the hand  
stretched out, and sparrows scurry towards the shoe.

It's not so simple for some other birds.  
I've often stood and watched them on the bridge;  
they fetched bread from the unemployment office.

When those birds ask for breadcrumbs from the sky,  
a bike, a movie, or a radio,  
the cavalry comes chasing round the corner.

### FABLE IN COLOURED CHALK

S. VESTDIJK (1898— )

The wind narrates: there is a wan  
Old woman without all her wits  
Who didn't much except to poke  
Green paper into draughty cracks.

She's one of those still waters with  
Nothing but money at their depths.  
She's lived alone for long, two cats  
Have been appointed bodyguards

With an eye to mice in the walls;  
They know it just as well as she—  
They are two stately figures, clad  
In furs with white-striped livery.

Now she is ill, dying almost.  
She makes strange gestures from her bed;  
With an inheritance of death,  
She wants to close by counting up.

The tomcats stare. Is it for them ?  
Is there still milk ? What fuss she makes !  
And they do not suspect that one  
Should give when such a gesture's made.

All seems in order, no default  
In their own natures: two bank clerks  
Who refuse payment, seeing that  
The indicated term has lapsed.

### SUNDAY AFTERNOON

ED. HOORNIK (1910— )

Walking through town on Sunday afternoon,  
mostly the alleys or along Zeedijk;  
loitering at a bar because of rain  
or the reflection in the zinc bar-top;

wishing to be one of the two who took  
the cues down from the rack; mechanically  
moving towards the toilet, peering through  
a tiny window at a flat rooftop.

Across the way the radio antennas,  
a broken statue on a balcony,  
empty flowerpots on the windowsills.

Walking through the evening to the station,  
watching the departure of the trains,  
staying behind alone on a dead platform.

### **“ they were always together ”**

HANS LODEIZEN (1924—1950)

they were always together

when they had done wrong  
in the fall

when they lay in the spring  
when they cycled  
because the summer passes by  
and the winter is not lonely  
when he was ill and the other  
hand lay in his like a gift

when they lay ill in bed  
and the bed was the covered wagon  
of their fear

when the bed was the valley of their  
jubilation and the body rested

when the days grew long

they were always together.

### **“ if i go now ”**

HANS LODEIZEN (1924—1950)

if i go now it will be  
softer, in the wind, in the houses,  
the heart will taste the sunflowers  
and the long voice trailing  
out of the room in the garden  
full of nightingale song more softly

if i go now it will bite  
less cruelly in your shoulder and  
it will lay pleasure on your body  
like much fruit on a bowl if  
i go now it will rain the  
wind will weave fairy tales in  
the evening if i go now it  
will be summer for the taking

but i still lie in your arms  
anchored in the port of the  
city but i am still with you  
but my voice is still gliding over  
you like a violin bow but i  
love you after all you know that  
but i am still asleep on your breast

i have not gone away yet  
the trains have all left  
i have not gone away yet  
the tickets have been sold  
the suitcases have got on  
i have stayed

if i go now it will be  
softer, in the wind, in the houses.  
and yet, although  
the wind has died down  
now, and the woods wave  
and nod  
now that sleep is sounding  
like a harp and  
the children sing  
i lay my elbow on the  
dark afternoon and cry

music falling through the woods  
like autumn leaves a song  
sung by the soprano of the oaks  
catch the long loot

but to go away  
before the hour is a moth  
that flies up and disappears

## CHURCHES

REMCO CAMPERT (1929—  
Everywhere

There are still churches, always built up  
Again. You can always find  
One or two women in them,  
Praying for nephews, for their own salvation,  
And so for the world's.

It's quiet in the churches, quieter  
Than in the open when there is no wind.  
Cold too, colder than  
On a frozen lake. The churches  
Are quiet and cold: it's called serene.  
At set times you can sing there.

There are churches in towns and villages,  
Scattered through the country, like  
Gasoline stations:

a man in  
Overalls cleans the windows, fills  
The tank, receives his money, goes  
Inside, reads his paper.

## WILLIAM FAULKNER: A PERSPECTIVE VIEW

ROGER HUBANK

When Faulkner's novel ' Soldier's Pay ' was published in 1926 the American literary scene was characterised by what was known as ' the new spirit '. The spearhead of this movement was directed against the ' Genteel Tradition ' in American Letters. It gathered a great deal of its impetus from the local discovery of Freud and his contemporaries, and from the growing appreciation of the radical elements in modern European culture. The Amory show of 1913 had directed attention towards the developments in the visual arts, and Continental drama together with the French symbolist poets and the new ' stream-of-consciousness ' experiments in prose, met with increasing popularity. To all this was added the war novel, capitalizing on the sense of the failure of the older generation to understand the world. This tended to drive American fiction further towards naturalism. Faulkner's two novels—' Soldier's Pay ', and ' Sartoris '—attempted to show that life was a great deal more than the orthodox American interpretation of sex, battle, idealism, and democracy.

The exact definition of this change in direction is difficult to describe. Perhaps it is easier to show its significance by pointing to what—to a certain extent—is a parallel change in the landscape of the English novel. In Virginia Woolf's essay ' Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown ', the writer distinguished between the ' Edwardians ' and the ' Georgians '. The former were the older novelists, Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett; the latter included herself, E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, T. S. Eliot, Joyce and Lawrence. Among the things which characterized these Georgians was their rejection of the older basis of things which conceived art as a representation, governed by an ethical idealism. This is true of the American novel. This was the age of Hemingway's ' A Farewell to Arms ', Dos Passos' ' Three Soldiers ', and the main body of Faulkner's work—from ' The Sound and The Fury ' to ' Absalom, Absalom '—is representative of a new interest in the individual, his actions and

his motives. There can be little doubt that this new idea was stirred to a large extent by such events as the Russian Revolution, the degradation of the first world war, the chaos of the American slump, and the disturbing changes in European art. One positive aspect of this new awareness was the realization that the psychology of the emotional—the work of Jung, Freud and Adler—was part of a universal revolution away from intellectual rationalism towards the subjective and its representatives, the German existentialists Heidegger and Husserl.

During this period of intellectual activity Faulkner wrote the majority of his Southern novels. His speech at the presentation of his Nobel prize, while rhetorical and a little melodramatic, echoed the tone of these novels with their stark presentation of actualities.

“Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question, when will I be blown up?” If this is to be accepted as a valid description of the contemporary situation—and many people would accept it—then such a universal fear as Faulkner describes must be the result of a widespread spiritual disintegration. And it is such a disintegration that Faulkner traces, through a generation which includes every representative of the social strata. Geographically Faulkner’s picture of decay is a Southern decay. It centres about his native Mississippi—called Yoknapatawpha County—and apart from ‘Pylon’ and ‘Mosquitoes’, all the novels are related and joined into an incomplete but complex Southern saga.

They follow the fortunes of several families—the Benbows, the Compsons, the Snopes, etc.—who represent different degrees in the social strata. Faulkner takes no trouble to remain consistent in the various details of these families, and the plots of the individual stories are often haphazardly constructed. ‘Light in August’ is quite straightforward, whereas ‘Absalom, Absalom’, like ‘Finnegan’s Wake’ has a circular construction. A feature of his work has been the violence of his detail, and the almost morbid treatment of the more unnatural of human attributes. It is true that he shares a concern for violence with the poet Robinson Jeffers, and rape, murder, incest, imbecility and miscegenation play a large part in the novels. Yet Jeffers hasn’t the humour nor the variety of Faulkner although the parallel is extremely interesting. In ‘Tamar’ and ‘Roan Stallion’, it is the unnatural crimes of incest and bestiality that concern the poet as a method of describing the degeneracy of his characters’ values. Jeffers shows a fastidious concern for words and rhythms and these enforce the disruptive emotional patterns of the plot. When one takes into account O’Neill’s dark investigations into psychopathology it can be seen that three of the most prominent of American writers, in their attempts to interpret a modern decadence, turn towards the same basic sin that formed the instrument for Sophocles and Aeschylus’ presentation of the decay of a Greek civilization.

The Yoknapatawpha saga has as its ostensible theme the degeneracy of the South. Yet this Regionalism does not exclude an ability to find universal significance; neither is it true that the concern for disintegration places Faulkner among Gertrude Stein's lost generation. He writes from a positive standpoint and never implies that he is part of the general decay. The Southern degeneracy is shown as part of an evolutionary spiral. Shrewdness and greed—the Snopes, who can be expected to produce a whole generation of company directors—overcome the traditions of the aristocratic Sartorises, and yet it is clearly shown that the internal weakness of the old Southern family is a result of their early greed at a time when the enslavement of negroes was the honourable way to an Empire. This dialectical view is symbolic of fear, more than of the destruction of the South. Inter-racial conflict is itself a symbol of something greater, with Yoknapatawpha becoming the cosmos and Memphis its ghastly Vanity Fair.

The most inclusive of the novels is undoubtedly 'Light in August'. Here the decadence of the South—and implicitly of the world—is explored more or less completely, without too much reference to the substance of the other books. 'Light in August' tells two stories: one is of the search of a young servant girl for the father of her child, and the other describes the persecution of Joe Christmas, a foundling boy. These two stories are gradually merged together in such a way as to involve the reader in the series of events, some of which are stark and terrible: the murder of Miss Burden by Joe and his subsequent lynching by Percy Grimm, the birth of Lucy Grove's baby. The word 'involve' is used advisedly. Faulkner forces his reader into participation in much the same way as Joyce. The ideal example from Joyce that springs to mind is the mental seduction by Bloom of the nursemaid on the Dublin seashore. Joyce rarely allows Bloom to make considered actions; what actually take place are a series of factual gestures. Faulkner does much the same thing. He never tells what lies *behind* the consciousness that is responsible for these gestures. The reader must find that out for himself.

With 'Intruder in the Dust' (1949), one can see an important shift in the moral emphasis of Faulkner's work away from the grim evil of 'The Sound and the Fury', towards a more steady recognition of active justice. This is in spite of the fact that it is a Negro who has to be *proved* innocent of the murder of a white man. Yet in spite of 'Intruder in the Dust' the prevailing quality of Faulkner's work lies in an awareness of evil which, in its power, approaches that of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. This awareness does not necessarily exclude a concern for those values which are so familiar to the reader of modern British novel. The objective values imposed by the Edwardians—Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett, etc.—upon their characters were rejected in America as in England. This similar rejection apart though, there remains very little in common between the British and American landscape of the early twentieth century. The reason for this difference in reaction is due, I think,

mainly to a difference in environment. The major slump after the first World War, the resurgence of the Ku-Klux-Klan, and the age of the Great Gatsby were far removed from Richmond, and the Cult of Senseibility pursued by the Schlegels. When the peasants, in the shape of Leonard Bast, enter Howard's End they are hardly convincing, and so the significance of the cosmic element—so highly valued by Bloomsbury—is more apparent when it exists in the Deep South.

"I know," says Helen Schlegel, "that personal relations are the real life, for ever, and ever." The relationship that E. M. Forster has in mind extends outside the obviously personal, to include a kind of cosmic sensibility, a universal awareness on the part of the individual. Whatever drawbacks that this may, or may not, have in 'Howard's End', the kind of relationship in which Faulkner's characters are involved, is much more clearly defined. Faulkner's man—the 'Faulknerian Man'—can most certainly be defined. One sees him as a great, godless—and yet divine—creature, doomed from birth to seek his own destruction. He is, to use an existentialist phrase, 'anguished, abandoned, and in despair'. One can see him dominating the shadowy outlines of 'Sartoris', and of 'Light in August', figuring like some fantastic Prometheus even in the most abject of humiliations. As I have said before he does not act; he is involved in a series of factual gestures. Even in 'Sanctuary' when Temple is raped with a corncob, Popeye's impotence extends even towards the girl who appears to have drifted aimlessly into her situation. Nothing has really happened; that is what Faulkner is trying to say. The interest, the real drama, lies behind these gestures. The Sartoris family, their previous history hanging like the Albatross around their necks, are bogged down in a morass of meaningless gestures. They are destroyed by time; they have no future; they are continually dying in the past:

"Freed as he was of time and flesh, he was a far more palpable presence than either of the other two old men who sat shouting periodically into one another's deafness."

They form the fatality of the present; 'fatal immortality and immortal fatality'.

So it can be said that Faulkner's man is to a large extent undiscoverable. He can be defined by the gestures that surround him, but his nature is hidden in a mist of complexes, aberrations, and family ghosts. He drifts towards his destiny. In 'The Sound and the Fury', Quentin's suicide is as tangible as the end of a squalid cul-de-sac, and he is propelled helplessly towards it. The answer to this, the apparent 'right attitude', is to be found in silence and quietude. Faulkner's heroes, Bayard Sartoris, the father of 'Absalom, Absalom', and Joe Christmas, find salvation in their acceptance of this creed.

"It's not when you realise that nothing can help you—religion, pride, anything—it's when you realize that you don't need any aid."

There is no future in life, and Man spends his time struggling with the libidos of the past. Progress becomes an absurdity.

It is hardly likely that Faulkner's man can be defined within the consciousness of an individual. He is a creature without any opportunity, moulded by the past. The individual on the other hand is conscious of himself only in the future. What I *shall* do and what I *can* become in the future, is what is important to me. And because the sum total of our nature is *not* to be found in the past, the absurdity that has entered into life is of Faulkner's own making. The future, the smallest incident of what *may* be, is of meaning to the individual. Man *is* the future of Man; he is the sum total of his *actions*, and consequently the world cannot die out of sheer boredom. And though at the moment the likeliest future may seem to prove catastrophic, the very act of being—even in the most anguished of creatures—includes an awareness of what will be. This awareness will result in action whether the creature acts, or is acted upon. And so one's relations—with the individual as well as the cosmos—depend upon the *personality*, not upon the past. While we can greatly admire Faulkner the novelist, we must dismiss the metaphysical conclusions that are to be derived from his work.

## BREAD RATHER THAN BLOSSOMS

D. J. Enright (Secker & Warburg, 1956) 10/6.  
VINCENT BUCKLEY

This latest book of poems shows how uncertain a footing D. J. Enright has on the staircase of the 'New Movement'. He may be on it, but he is hardly of it. For one thing, his creative attempt is clearly more ambitious than that of any of the other members. It inclines more vehemently towards subjects and attitudes of a more obvious importance. Larkin in his three or four best poems seems a much more finished poet; but there is something in Enright's total output which is more impressive, more likeable.

It is the *effort* represented by the volume as a whole which leads me to use the word 'impressive', but it is an impressiveness of attitude, of patent intention, rather than of artistic achievement; and it is an impressiveness which has, in the end, something distinctly monotonous about it.

This greater ambition, this sense of a real effort being expended, goes with his typical preoccupations. He is alone in the 'Movement' in the intensity of his concern with what he calls 'humanism'. One wouldn't have thought of John Wain or Robert Conquest as an unacknowledged legislator of the nation, much less the world. But Enright's preoccupations are open and public; they declare themselves in the titles of his books: *Bread rather than Blossoms*, *Literature for Man's Sake*. These two latest works exhibit a man who has located the misery of mankind in the Japan of the 1950's, and who is in danger of being overcome by the realization.

He is angry, ironic, compassionate—and unashamedly all three. Some of the poems are merely pieces of wry reportage; others read like extended *bons mots*. Nor is irony, of course, his only method of

emotional control. Many of these poems have touches of a genuine and robust humour, by no means always savage. See, as an example, his very funny 'Displaced Person looks at a Cage-bird', printed in *The Listener* for September 27th. It bears comparison with the utterly dead discursiveness of the two poems by Conquest in the same issue. But the humour in the book is occasional, and occupies an uneasy partnership with his more constant serious attitudes. To say this is to announce that I have a predisposition in his favour. But it is not to say anything useful about the poetry except that it is not wary of proclaiming itself, that it 'declares an interest', as the political lobbyists say. But where and what are the values that such a proclamation implies? How do they live in the poems themselves. Conceptually, they seem to consist in a refusal to be fooled by systems or appearances, in a sense of the value of human personality and the importance of human rights. But, poetically, they seem to exist generally in a sort of rejection, of implicit negation:

"The professor's house is broken: a current underground  
Corrects his papers with contempt; the neighbours  
Hunt to their sources in the shifting earth  
His dirty children and his injured books.

Part of our labours,  
Part of the curriculum, one sees it with a smile,  
With the sturdy aid of cliché one bows to the inevitable—  
The sudden sea that drowned  
The painter in his patience, the poet rejected by his lungs,  
The true voice shaken silent by the quaking ground.  
The hand that feeds us also bites."

Here, in this more than representative passage, we see his half-exerted strength and his encroaching weakness. It is a poem to which we respond immediately, as to something with a quality of fitness, but as it were cursorily. The issues are plain, the controlling attitude really controls a limited, 'conceited' insight which pretends to no great comprehensiveness. Here are, if not anger, at least irony and a sort of compassion, but they issue in an insistent note of self-reproach, self-deprecation, even self-contempt, which is at bottom disabling and sentimental. For this poem is not a process of questioning, of that questioning which establishes values by the very precision and intensity of its probing, but a muttered ritual of accusation. The accusation is no less basic for being concealed under the resigned 'smile', with its promise of self-awareness. And the feeling which is embodied is the feeling that circumstances are a cage, in which poetry and teaching have only a factitious value. In this context, the final line must appear not only pitiable, but shoddy:

"One breeds another child, or buys some cheap editions,  
uneasily nesting, as the river in its bed."

One sympathises; one sees where the feeling comes from, and why; but one cannot rest long in a poetry which is not merely a self-accusation but which is actually a sort of fouling of the poetic nest.

This is not the only poem which is impressive in its personal honesty, and in its air of hard facts being faced and moulded by a sort of intelligent resoluteness. *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, *End of a Hot Day*, *Samisen Music*, and *Soiree* are all distinguished by beginning in a direct, personal mode, and going on for at least some of their length to be guided by a rhythmic speech that is the index of a moral and intellectual honesty. Each has mature, confident touches, an individual resonance; each makes gallant promises of complete integrity. But in none does the rhythm persist and develop to completion, in none does the maturity of tone remain. Each slackens far too soon, becomes over-insistent, and ends by vulgarising its creative impulse. *End of a Hot Day*, for example, has a beginning which I can only call calmly lovely; but the cheapness of its last line betrays the power that precedes it:

"Shall I beat the cat who ate the bird who ate  
the worm who might have eaten me?"

And all the others I have mentioned have a clumsiness, an inefficacy of attitude and phrasing, which not only qualifies but mars their effectiveness.

These are among the most tempting, the almost-realised poems; and yet each of them is *inconclusive* in a way in which art cannot afford to be. I cannot, in the space at hand, demonstrate this contention critically. But I may offer a suggestion to account for the inconclusiveness itself. It seems to me that Enright is scared of his own poetic impulse, and of the interior tasks to which it calls him. His insight into the contemporary muddle is a genuine one; it is an insight born of courage—courage to face the social facts and not to shirk the task of estimating his own moral and emotional commitment to them; he is certainly *engagé*, refreshing in his concern with other lives. But it strikes me that his commitment is no more than social; it is insufficiently creative. And it is creation that we are interested in, the thing done, not the thing intended; for fine poetry his insight is not patient enough, not inward or balanced, not the self-commitment of a really forceful creative impulse. As it comes into the poetry, it is not concentrated enough, it lacks artistic passion. This lack is seen in the general absence of a compelling personal rhythm, in the failures of taste, and in the lack of what we might call formal stamina:

The bone, I thought, is a long way down,  
Below all the sorrow and trash of this town.  
Yet I could have trusted his accurate verse  
For a spring day comes, to allay the long curse.

This, for all its calmly balanced and unforced opening, is a disturbing hotch-potch; and the disturbance is all the greater because of the fineness of its initial handling and rich promise. The flexibility of tone carries on to the fifth line; it is in the sixth line that the coming break-down can be noted; it begins with a slackness of movement which has as its concomitant a false note, a note either of disguised self-pity or of desperate, extravagant gesture. The six lines which follow are bewildering in their changes of rhythm—changes both inept and unprepared for—and in their failure to offer us any distinctive tone, the pledge of any stabilising attitude. It is a failure at once representative and significant.

It is a failure of sustained impulse. Is it also a failure of nerve? I think, in a sense, it is. His theme is the fate of man as it is reflected in contemporary Japan; his poetic method is generally one of ironic protesting analysis of one or other facet of reflection. But where is his centre of balance? Where is the passionate inward attention from which alone this analysis could get its poetic force? It seems to me not to exist. What does exist is its near relative and opposite—an open, nervous, almost didactic groping with the separate issues. There is an inhibition in him: an inhibition against writing at all. Thus he despairs any deeply formal control of his insight, and tries to check his ironic anger merely by a wilful variation of its formulae. This is obviously not good enough; it results, as I have said, in arbitrary and generally undistinguished rhythms—whether nerveless or too nervous it is hard to say. But the carrying into effect of his poetic impulse is generally a matter of the nerves; and they are nerves which, at the crucial point, the point of potential development, fail the intention behind them. In short, he is a self-conscious artist, but one whose self-consciousness extends to the very basis, the *raison d'être* of his art. It generates, not an adaptable strength, but a tremulous doubt.

Only by some such approach, only in some such terms, can I hope to indicate his achievement. I can offer no more than general remarks, a general diagnosis. Detailed analysis, it seems to me, would be out of place. The poems have—they are probably intended to have—a cumulative effect, an effect almost of direct rhetorical persuasion. And it is the nature of this effect that a critic must try to specify. In specifying it, he must testify to whatever general unease he feels.

Part of the effect is to remind us of the existence of certain issues, and that in Enright we have a man courageous and open enough to feel them as matter for art. But, generally, only as matter. For it also makes us hope that, if these issues are to be dealt with in contemporary poetry, they will be dealt with from a very different depth and focus. Enright stands as an example of manliness among the

pusillanimous and the effete; but we expect of poetry a more profound and a more completed achievement than his work even signalises. Poetry demands almost a different concern, is almost a different task.

## SECOND THOUGHTS ON THE NEW MOVEMENT

New Lines	ed. Robert Conquest (MacMillan, 12/6).
Poetry of the 1950's	ed. D. J. Enright (Kenkyusha Press,
Poetry Now	ed. G. S. Fraser (Faber, 15/-). [Tokyo].
A Word Carved on a Sill	by John Wain (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 10/6).

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

Now that the storm of controversy about the New Movement has to a certain extent abated and London has found other fashions to follow, it is perhaps possible to arrive at a more balanced assessment than could be attempted in our earlier New Movement Supplement, when our main task was obviously to show that these poets and novelists were being grotesquely overrated or encouraged for the wrong reasons. The arrival of Mr. Enright's and Mr. Conquest's anthologies both consecrates the movement and provides a convenient basis for a general judgment. Since both books include the same names—Jennings, Holloway, Larkin, Amis, Enright, Davie, Conquest, and Wain—with Mr. Gunn appearing only in *New Lines* and since anyway most of these poets have already been discussed in *Delta*, I won't attempt a re-assessment of their work, but concentrate rather on the sort of defence of their work that is offered by these two editors in their anthologies.

Mr. Enright's book, perhaps because it was aimed primarily at a Japanese audience, who would be too far from the actual literary events to be outraged, is less of a manifesto than Mr. Conquest's, and for that reason more reasonable and patient in its tone. Although as a whole, Mr. Enright's introduction is intelligent, honest, and amusing. Nevertheless it shares with the later book a tendency to sneer. For instance: 'Politics of course were considerably more fashionable in those days (i.e. the '30s) than they are now.' This seems to me a slick, and critically irresponsible way of making a valid distinction, because it implies as generally true what applies only to the lesser poets, that the poets of the thirties were not radically affected by the Spanish Civil War or the rise of Fascism, and were concerned only with a literary fashion. (cf. Amis' playboy attitude: 'It seems clear enough that the poetry of Dylan Thomas and George Barker . . . is passing out of fashion'). This represents the most disturbing feature of New Movement propaganda as a whole which is its tendency to oversimplify literary history, to damn the 'forties out of hand, and to regard the 'thirties as 'good chaps' but a bit too keen on politics to be any use to us, what? What can one think of Mr. Conquest when he writes 'In the 1940's the mistake was made of giving the Id, a sound player on the percussion side

under a strict conductor, too much of a say in the doings of the orchestra as a whole. As it turned out, it could only manage the simpler part of the melody and rhythm, and was completely out of its depth with harmony and orchestration. *This led to a rapid collapse of public taste, from which we have not yet recovered.*' This last statement is fantastic in precisely the dogmatic way of which we who criticised the Movement have been accused, for Mr. Conquest makes no attempt to prove this key generalisation, and, as David Wright points out very well in his recent review in *Encounter*, the 'forties present by no means so uniform a picture as Mr. Conquest would have us believe. Mr. Enright is more catholic and tolerant, but even he sees the issue as one of two comparatively simple alternatives—"For the new poet there can be no more clever manipulation of 'fragments': The Waste Land has been laid waste by its imitators. Neither do the political modes of the 'thirties offer themselves at this point; it is in a sense a tribute to the state of the country that there should be so little political excitement in Britain today, though it may also be a reflection on the troubled state of the world as a whole. This troubled state makes it unlikely that we shall see a pronounced revival of anything which might be called romanticism in the near future, since romanticism springs from a wholehearted and simple faith in mankind. *What we have to do is to resuscitate the idea of the dignity of the human individual . . .*" What one disputes is that the moderation he finds in his poets is the right solution to the situation, which he describes, I think, fairly enough. Mr. Enright is honest enough to see the shortcomings of his poets. What makes the book so persuasive is that he recognises the danger of over-self-consciousness, agrees with Amis (who comes fairly well out of this anthology) in deplored 'meagreness and triviality of subject matter,' leading to 'uncontrolled emotionalism and self dramatisation or to arid wittiness and niggling cleverness, noting also that too much value can be attached to intellectuality. Although this is avowedly 'an interim report', it would seem to be so honest as to knock away the ground from under its own feet in so far as it is not only representing but advocating these poets. Apart from several acute notes as on Auden's cruelty, or on neo-Empsonian poetry as aestheticism, he can also say that 'what (Thomas) has to offer—passion and rhythmical energy—is precisely what contemporary verse is weak in', and he is aware of the danger of publicity acting 'as a pressure on the developing poet, restricting his growth or contorting it; he may find himself giving the public what it wants instead of what he uniquely has to offer.'

All that seems to emerge is a 'chastened common sense' and a 'fairly tough intelligence and unwillingness to be deceived', which does not seem of itself to provide a very stable foundation for a new trend in poetry. This tendency to self criticism is repeated in the short prefaces allowed to each of the contributing poets. Davie remarks, that English poetry is now elegant and humane but rather unambitious, too limited in its scope, insufficiently various and adventurous. A poem should convey a sense of elation . . . by its

formal mastery. This last dictum, which applies perfectly to much of Yeats, fails when applied to Davie himself whose ambitious or at least not trivial themes are ruined precisely by an irrelevant technical mastery which reduces everything to its own suave flatness. Amis also looks for strict fairly simple stanzas, lucidity and formal discipline, condemning poets (and this might have been written expressly for Mr. Wain) who think they can be as trite as they please provided as they do it in terza rima. Wain talks of 'shaping intelligence, clarity, precision, logic'; he aims at poise, coherence, and a logical *raison d'être* for every word image, and metaphor used. Enright, while stressing the need for a relationship of some sort between literature and life is so chary of appearing to moralise, that he understates his very reasonable case, and his humanity begins to appear like universal tolerance.

I have spent so much time summarizing these theories because what I want to show is not that the theories or opinions are themselves unsound though frequently too exclusive, but rather that they bear very little resemblance to the practice. Whether theory or practice came first would be invidious to decide. Those who oppose the Movement do so not because they want a return to flamboyance, illogicality, wild rhetoric, sloppiness, etc., but because they do not accept the Movement's thesis that theirs is the only or the best alternative now possible to such writing.

This sort of manifesto attitude is most noticeable in Mr. Conquest's anthology. The remarkable thing is that, despite his attacks on *Delta*'s intolerant tone Mr. Conquest's own vice is precisely this. Having dismissed as 'residual nuisances' what is by no means proved, and certainly not here by Mr. Conquest, the 'social realists, lallans mongers, church furnishers, and Neo-Georgians', Mr. Conquest gives this account of the '40s: '(poets) were encouraged to regard their task as simply one of making an arrangement of images of sex, violence, tapped straight from the unconscious (a sort of upper-middle-brow horror comic) and to evoke *without comment* the naivetés and nostalgias of childhood'. For anyone not acquainted with the work of this period this is a gross misrepresentation. But Mr. Conquest is not so concerned with historical accuracy or fairness as with advocating a cause, and this is seen in the words 'without comment'. He speaks of the 'debilitating theory that poetry *must* be metaphorical' yet does not explain why it must debilitate and what alternative theory we might reasonably prefer. Instead of which the change in attitude during the last four or five years is contrasted with the 'vicious taste' of the war years, in terms of health and sickness: 'It was in the late 1940s and early 1950s that a number of poets began to emerge who have been progressing from different viewpoints to a certain unity of approach, a new and *healthy* general standpoint'. This standpoint '... is the restoration of a sound and fruitful attitude to poetry, of the principle that poetry is written by and for the whole man, intellect, emotions, senses, and all'. This is to say the least, arguable; as was pointed out in our New Movement Supplement, Mr. Conquest's own poems are in

practice, whatever excellent literary theory went to their engendering, without emotive power. Mr. Conquest is elaborately modest. We will find, he says, no 'great systems of theoretical constructs, nor agglomerations of unconscious commands... it is free from' (or: it lacks) 'both mystical and logical compulsions and, like modern philosophy is empirical in its attitude to all that comes' What compulsions are left? Much, surely, of the whole order Mr. Conquest evoked has already been wilfully excluded. Its alleged reverence for the real (as opposed to the theoretic) person or event leads in fact to small-scale hesitancy and the sort of tolerance that is merely a refusal to commit oneself. What in fact Mr. Conquest does throughout, whether explicitly in his theories, or implicitly in the tone of his references, is to narrow the poetic field to suit his own and his colleague's requirements.

The preface to Mr. Fraser's *Poetry Now* also attempts to categorise, but with no visible propagandist end.

Mr. Fraser stresses the relatively minor talent, and admits to finding no new dominating personality or style; this is specifically not a programme anthology. Much of the preface is taken up with a sort of literary history of the last fifty years of British poetry, in which there are many over-simplifications (is it possible faced with *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and the 'terrible' sonnets to claim that Hopkins' emphasis is assertive rather than doubtful or questioning?) and many concessions to 'what was thought', for instance that 'augustan poetry cannot be written without an augustan audience.'

Of course there is no space for detailed analysis of particular poems; the nearest we get is his account of Edwin Muir where his tragic man's eye image of the human struggle in *The Labyrinth* is related to his Glasgow childhood, and in his comments on W. S. Graham's *Night Fishing*. That is not to deny that Mr. Fraser is very cautious also when he deals with the New Movement; apart from repeating the fallacy that the new poets 'were more in sympathy with the "puritan" and provincial strands in the English tradition' (which seems to me to apply in any real sense of the word Puritan, only to Davie) the total attitude has changed; each incredibly minor poet, such as Jonathan Price and George McBeth, is characterised by a single restraining phrase. The danger of aridity that always comes from playing safe having been mentioned, Mr. Fraser concludes with the obvious but none the less valuable point that the New Movement doesn't have a monopoly of concern for careful craftsmanship.

This introduction then is an honest attempt to see the period in perspective, and one which does not hesitate to be critical, but even so one can see little connection between the introduction and the actual poems selected. Mr. Fraser risks the value judgment of saying that he thinks the anthology contains a great many good poems of a surprising variety of sorts and perhaps no great poems. The second part is fair enough; allowing for their painfully inadequate representation, the poets which seemed to me to come out best from this anthology were Alun Lewis, F. T. Prince (with *Soldiers Bathing*), and Geoffrey Hill, whose powerful *The Genesis* is

even so not his best, but these stand out from a book crammed with trivia by any standard, people like Bergonzi or MacBeth, who have got in presumably for Litt. Hist. reasons with their fundamentally unserious poetstry. If this as Mr. Fraser says, an age of transition, for God's sake don't let's prolong the agony; better to give us cheap editions of Yeats or Graves to name only two poets whose influence might serve to bring some life and contact with reality into English poetry. As it is this volume calls for no individual and no period re-assessment; in short it has no *raison d'être*.

Having said so much it is obvious that I am not going to like Mr. Wain's latest book, *A Word carved on a Sill*. The only reason for reviewing him is that elsewhere his verse has been praised for a formal reserve, for being strong and well-proportioned, etc. Although he is certainly the most insistent, not to say the most exhibitionist, apologist for the New Movement, his poems here entirely lack these qualities, and possess instead the more fashionable quality of evasion, either by pointless cleverness in the idea itself (as in *Poem feigned to have been written by an Electronic Brain*) or by pointless form both spiced by vulgarity. It is inevitable that having usually nothing of any urgency or point to say, the villanelle should be Mr. Wain's favourite verse form; its circular assertions do not explore a problem but merely grant or concede casually before returning to the first statement. The poem supposedly 'about' Keats and Fanny Brawne, *Don't let's spoil it all, I thought we were going to be such good friends*, is typical in its appalling flippancy and refusal to make seriously 'involved' comments; it begins:

"It seems the poet made a bad mistake  
How could she know how awful passion was?  
The lesson is that breaking hearts must break."

The trouble not only with Mr. Wain's poetry but with that of many of his fashionable contemporaries, is that they use the general statement not as a finding, to be justified in the imagery and texture of the poem, in its total commitment to its subject, but as an assertion. The alternative to this seems to be the sort of mock modesty that ruins what was otherwise not too bad a poem, *In Memory of Henry Payne*—

"Dead? This is the time when we  
    wish we were poets to strip our stale speech clean,  
    that out of our posture and gesture some fine thing  
    might spring, fitting and natural to our sorrow."

This shares with so many of these poems that disastrous sort of English understatement associated with Old Boys' Clubs, 'good chaps', and wringing handshakes. But if it is not enough, look at the posturing in *Reason for not writing orthodox nature poetry*—

"But leave me free to make a sterner choice  
    Content without embellishment to note  
    How little beauty makes the heart rejoice,  
    How little beauty catches at the throat,  
    Simply I love this mountain and this bay  
    With love that I can never speak by rote,  
    And where you love you cannot break away."

None of Mr. Wain's poetry is simple in that sense, it is all very self-conscious, afraid of revealing feeling directly and so continually constructing masks which slip just enough to show the softness underneath—viz., the continual invocations to 'love' in *Usefulness of Light* or *Letter to Santa Claus*.

*The Times Literary Supplement* reviewer finds the best poems to be those in which the sensuous image is given rein among the conceptual ones; these poems I do not find at all. Where sensuous images are used, as in *On reading Love Poetry in a Dentist's Waiting Room*, they are used entirely intellectually, not as part of the structure of the poem, but as good-natured illustration—

"Yet in some silent sphere beyond the grave  
Their pleasure and my pain shall be as one,  
When all sensation, like a breaking wave,  
Shall sink into the pebbles and be gone."

It would be tedious to show in much more detail how Mr. Wain does *not* develop his image of the first three lines of *Cameo*—

"Consider; Lovers like bridges arch across  
Dividing landscapes. Their meetings are moments  
Most high and innocent, their swift silences / Rich . . ."

So that one rarely knows where the poem is metaphorical, where actual. If what I have already said together with the quotation do not convince the reader that Mr. Wain's intentions are utterly trivial, further examples will be wasted.

## THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM GOLDFING

ARTHUR MARDEN.

Mr. Golding's first novel, "Lord of the Flies", was received with enthusiasm, and when "The Inheritors" appeared, words like 'genius' began to be applied to him readily and without qualification. A third novel, "Pincher Martin", has now been published, and it is easier to take an objective view of his work. The picture that forms is of a writer of striking but limited creative powers, which have been obscured and weakened by the very interests that first stimulated them.

"Lord of the Flies" tells of a party of schoolboys air-wrecked on a desert island. They try at first to maintain the forms and values of civilised life, but the pattern of their society changes and they become a "tribe" of primitive, painted savages. Ralph, their first leader and the last boy to retain something of his former standards, is being hunted through the island by the blood-thirsty tribe when a boat-load of sailors from a passing vessel arrive and order is restored. The growth of the tribe, not unnaturally, follows the known pattern of primitive societies—from hunting, through the fear and personification of the unknown (there is a snake-like "beastie" in the woods) to tribal dances, rituals, sacrifices and taboos.

This aspect has been over-stressed by many reviewers, e.g., Mr. John Connell in the *Evening News*: "... In these well brought-up little boys is worked out a vast passage of human history . . ." etc.

This seems to me to miss the point. It is not the evolution of a primitive social pattern, but the gradual fading of a civilised one, and the conflict of the two, that is central in the novel. It is "convincing and often very frightening" because we are made to feel the slow triumph of barbarism, blood-lust, fear and instinct over what we should like to think are the permanent inner qualities of modern human beings, and to accept, though unwillingly, the probability of such a process of degradation as the novel presents. We have to accept it because the change in the boys' minds and attitudes is so convincing psychologically. Mr. Golding knows how the minds of boys work (he is in fact a schoolmaster) and his treatment of them is so free from any false note that we cannot relax with a shrug and decide that it couldn't really happen.

Thus the novel confronts our comfortable habits of thought with the question "How civilised are we, in reality?" The central conflict is one that involves us all, and Ralph, trying to keep up the signal-fire that is the boys' only hope of return to civilisation, is in the place of the intelligent man in modern, or indeed in any, society. Though there is no worked-out, point-by-point allegory, "Lord of the Flies" is a sort of modern parable.

Its faults, minor ones, are faults of over-explicitness. When one of the boys is throwing stones to scare a smaller boy who is playing at the edge of the sea, he throws so as to miss by a considerable margin. A paragraph is then spent in explaining that this is a taboo carried-over from his former life, enforced by his parents on the beach at Margate, etc. Similarly, the ending is crudified by an anxiety that we shall miss the point; the young naval officer finds the boys reduced to savagery, and is told that three of the party have been killed by their former comrades; he promptly observes that he would have expected British boys to have put up a better show. The reader may well feel insulted at this concern to ram the moral down his throat. On the whole, however, the novel succeeds.

"The Inheritors" has its successes also, but they are of a decidedly lesser kind. The subject is the arrival of men on the earth, as seen by a tribe of ape-men, who die or are killed one by one until the new species has entered fully into its inheritance. The anthropological interest in primitive societies now becomes dominant, and though the writer's evocation of prehistoric conditions is effective and his ability to present the slow and painful processes of the sub-human mind is well-nigh incredible, one is left with a feeling of dissatisfaction because nothing more is engaged. To share the incomprehension and inarticulacy of an ape-man is a new and interesting experience, but it involves the reader in a struggle to find out what is going on that becomes extremely wearing. This is especially true in the chapters where Lok and Fa, the last free representatives of "the people", look down from their tree-top upon the strange new activities of the humans below.

"There was nothing of interest now but the logs (boats). They were very smooth and shiny inside where the wood could be seen and outside there were long smears like the whiteness of a rock when the sea has gone back and the sun has dried it. The edges were rounded, depressed in places where the hands of the bone-faces (men) had rested. The shapes inside them were too various and numerous to be sorted. There were round stones, sticks, hides, there were bundles bigger than Lok, there were patterns of vivid red, bones that had grown into live shapes, the very ends of the brown leaves where the men held them were shaped like brown fish, there were smells, there were questions and no answers. Lok looked without seeing and the picture slid apart and came together again."

We either fail to understand or understand too early and too well, so that the mind loses interest and tries to run on ahead of the ape-man's perceptions; and this is not the worst passage of its kind. After much of this there are so many questions and no answers that the reader starts to look without seeing. Not that the whole novel is like this, of course.

"It was Mal, coming slowly and coughing every now and then. He came round the last tree-trunk, stopped in the beginning of the open space, leaned heavily on the torn end of his thorn bush and began to cough. As he bent over they could see where the white hair had fallen away in a track that led from behind his eyebrows over his head and down into the mat of hair that lay across his shoulders. The people said nothing while he coughed, but waited, still as deer at gaze, while the mud rose in square lumps that elongated and turned over between their toes. A sharply-sculptured cloud moved away from the sun and the trees sifted chilly sunlight over their naked bodies."

This is more typical of Mr. Golding's writing. The freshness of insight that could produce "Lord of the Flies" and his intense imaginative engagement in what he is saying are reflected in a fresh, original manner and a strong grasp of concrete actuality. This is at its most striking in "Lord of the Flies," which contains no relaxation of the writer's engagement in his words, no slip into cliché, from cover to cover.

With "Pincher Martin", unfortunately, it is not so. The originality is sought for its own sake, and a constant strain results, which leads, in spite of the effort to avoid cliché, to a loss of concreteness and even to lapses into hackneyed phrases and imagery.

"The waves were each an event in itself. A wave would come weltering and swinging in with a storm-light running and flickering along the top like the flicker in a brain. The shallow water beyond the safety rock would occur, so that the nearer part of the wave would rise up, tripped and angry, would roar, swell forward. The safety rock would become a pock in a whirlpool of water that spun itself into foam and chewed like a mouth. The whole top of the wave for a hundred yards would move forward and fall into acres of lathering uproar that was launched like an army at the rock."

It is, paradoxically, the conscious intensity of the earlier sentences that gives rise to "launched like an army" in the last. And this sense of local strain is an indication of a larger failure in the whole novel.

"Pincher Martin" is the story of an R.N.V.R. lieutenant whose ship is torpedoed. He is washed up on a rock (presumably Rockall) and in his reflections between the struggles to live and keep sane we learn of his sordid civilian life, how he has failed as an actor and a lover, and in the end murdered his best friend, who was to have married a woman that has rejected Martin's own advances. He reaches a degree of self-knowledge, goes mad and dies. By a "twist" reminiscent of the cheaper short stories we learn that in fact he drowned immediately and everything since page 10 has taken place only in the mind of the drowning man.

This, presumably, is to give added significance to the self-knowledge theme and to the talk about "the technique of dying into heaven" which the preacher friend, Nathaniel, indulges in. In fact, it merely adds to a general confusion. I do not think that Mr. Golding injects "significance" to impress the reader, but it is plain at a single reading that the "dying into heaven", the symbol of the Chinese box with maggots inside, and the bewildering way in which Martin's "centre" recedes inside his head, looks out under the "arches of his skull", enlarges to include the whole head (and body?) and repeats the process again, that these things are not subordinated to a clear central conception. Here, in fact, we have Mr. Golding's psychological interests rampant, and obscuring the creative efforts. There is no emergent unity, no completed response in the reader when he closes the book, and he is not totally engaged by the book as by "Lord of the Flies". There are passages of the old, powerful prose and the psychology, when held in check, is again convincing, for example in the approach of Martin's insanity, but the novel as a whole fails.

It would be wrong to leave the final stress on the novelist's weaknesses, however. He may not have, as Mr. Koestler thinks he has, produced "an earthquake in the petrified forests of the English novel", but all the novels are worth reading, and their originality of vision and language sets them apart from the great bulk of present-day novels. "Lord of the Flies", an isolated achievement unlikely, I think, to be equalled by Mr. Golding in the future, is certainly the best post-war novel I know of.





